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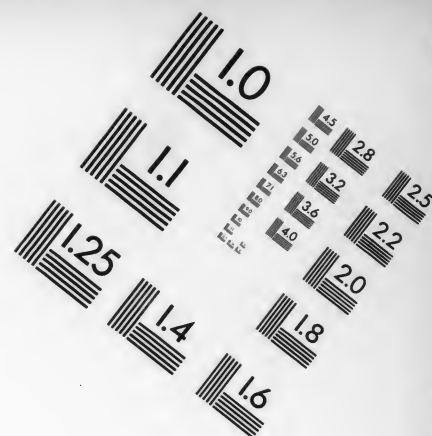
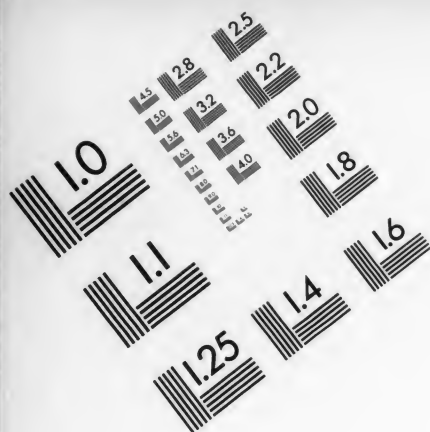


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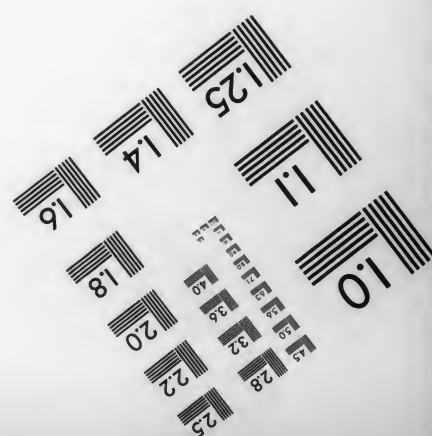
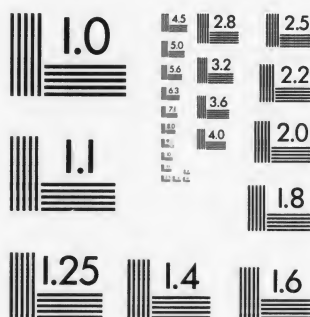
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THE AMPHITRUO OF PLAUTUS

BY HENRY W. PRESCOTT

In a recent article (*Götting. Nachricht.*, 1911, 254 ff.) Leo, following suggestions of Kakridis and elaborating hints of his own in the first edition of his *Plautinische Forschungen*, has set forth a theory that the *Amphitruo* is the result of a contamination of two Greek comedies; by this theory he explains seemingly uneven and inconsistent features of the dramatic structure. Wilamowitz, in the course of a study of Aristophanes' *Wasps* (*Sitzb. Berlin. Akad.*, 1911, 485-86), briefly demurred; weakness in details, according to Wilamowitz, may be explained by the condition of our text of Plautus, and the assumption that one of the two plays, in Leo's theory, treated the conception of Heracles (the other his birth) presupposes a drama which leads to no easily imagined dramatic issue. Wilamowitz' remarks were so brief and general, however, that Leo has been able, in the second edition of his *Forschungen* (p. 185, n. 2), to dismiss them with the rejoinder that the play in question might be brought to a conclusion by the appearance of Zeus, and that the details in the *Amphitruo* are not the disturbing element: it is the weakness in the dovetailing of the larger essential parts that supports his theory of contamination.

The study of contamination in Plautus is regarded with disapproval by a prominent English scholar (cf. Lindsay, *Burs. Jahresb.*, 130 [1906], 150), and one must admit that it seldom issues in inevitable conclusions; but the by-products of such study are of no little importance; by this means the features of Plautus' technique are set in sharp relief, and ultimately by comparative study of the plays, we may attain results of value to the history of Hellenistic comedy as a literary type. But, however pertinent and valuable the investigation may be, in the case of a mythological travesty it is attended by peculiar difficulties: every mythological travesty, in its original Greek form, was the result of contamination—a contamination of the myth (usually a literary treatment of the myth) with comic

elements. The real weaknesses in the structure of the *Amphitruo* would be found in the single play which, in my view, was translated or adapted by Plautus; these weaknesses result inevitably so soon as the myth is dramatized, and may well be increased so soon as the dramatized myth is combined with the motives of a comedy of errors for the purposes of a mythological travesty. But to the real weaknesses Leo has added a structural defect which I hope to show is the product merely of his own imagination.

I

The starting-point of Leo's theory is the fact that the presuppositions and the conclusion of the *Amphitruo* cannot be reconciled with the "long night" which is mentioned in the prologue (113), in the first scene (270-90), and in the parting of Alcmena and Juppiter (546-50). Amphitruo left Alcmena with child; at the opening of the play she is pregnant with a seven-months child by Juppiter; the play concludes with the birth of two sons. With this action the "long night" is incompatible; for the νύξ μακρά is properly the wedding-night of the god, and to make it immediately precede the day of birth "ist ein Unding." It might, of course, be argued that these circumstances were so combined to satisfy the sense of humor of a far from refined audience—such an audience, for example, as found entertainment in the Greek original of Plautus' *Casina*. But Leo might respond that in the *Amphitruo* there is not the slightest indication of any grossly comic intention; the comic effects are produced by the motives of the comedy of errors; there is, to be sure, buffoonery like that of vss. 664-74, but there is no emphasis upon any comic element in the relation of the long night to Alcmena's condition. One might even suspect that this combination of events was from a tragic source, though, from a modern standpoint, it is difficult to imagine a tragic drama constructed on such lines.

It is quite impossible to restore any of the ancient tragedies on Alcmena and Amphitruo from the fragments of plays or from the references in ancient literature. That the long night was at times included in the tragic action is clear: so much may fairly be inferred from the well known passage of Ovid's *Tristia*, unless one regards the pertinent phrase as mere periphrasis for the hero's name:

omne genus scripti gravitate tragoedia vincit:
haec quoque materiam semper amoris habet.

quid Danaen Danaesque nurum matremque Lyaei
Haemonaque et noctes quae¹ coiere duas? (ii. 381-82, 401-2).

If the vase-painting² regarded by archaeologists as suggested by a tragedy, and perhaps by Euripides' tragedy, is accepted as evidence, the appearance of Eos in the scene of Alcmena's rescue from Amphitruo by Zeus must point to early morning as the time of the action, and, as the action is the climax or catastrophe, the presence of Eos presupposes earlier action in the preceding night and, presumably, the long night. Finally, the Νύξ Μακρά of the comic poet Plato may suggest that the tragic material which it parodied covered the long night. Even in Plautus' play the impressive dignity with which Juppiter dismisses the long night (546-50) perhaps comes, ultimately, from a tragic source. The νύξ μακρά was primarily the night of generation and foreboded the strength of the heroic Heracles: Diod. iv. 9. 2; Lucian, *Dial. Deor.* x; Ovid, *Her.* ix. 9 ("... nox . . . una non tanti ut tantus conciperere fuit"); Seneca, *Agam.* 824 ("sensit ortus, sensit occasus Herculem nasci: violentus ille nocte non una poterat creari"); *Herc.* 23 (where *ortus* is to be interpreted by *nasci . . . creari* in the *Agamemnon*). Nor can there be any doubt, I think, that Leo's answer to Wilamowitz' objection (that the drama on the generation of Heracles "ist gar nicht zu Ende zu denken") is sufficient; the appearance of Zeus would bring about a solution of the difficulties and a dramatically impressive conclusion; indeed, the opening sentences of Apollodorus' account of the myth (*Bibl.* ii. 4. 8) would serve as a description of a good plot: Ζεὺς διὰ νυκτὸς ἐλθὼν καὶ τὴν μίαν τριπλασιάσας νύκτα ὁμοίως Ἀμφιτρώωνι γενόμενος Ἀλκμήνῃ συνηνέσθη καὶ τὰ γενόμενα περὶ Τηλεβοῶν διηγήσατο. Ἀμφιτρώων δὲ παραγενόμενος ὥς οὐχ ἑώρα φιλοφρονουμένην πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν γυναῖκα ἐπυνθάνετο τὴν αἰτίαν· εἰπούσης δὲ ὅτι τῇ προτεραίᾳ νυκτὶ παραγενόμενος αὐτῇ συγκεκοίμηται, μανθάνει παρὰ Τειρεσίῳ τὴν γενομένην τοῦ Διὸς συνουσίαν. . . .

¹ According to Owen's apparatus this is the reading of all the MSS (except L, which has *qui* for *quae*); but many modern editors since Heinsius accept the emendation *noctes cui coiere duae*.

² Cf. Engelmann *Beitr. zu Euripides I, Alcmena* (Berlin, 1882); Murray *Journ. Hellen. Stud.* XI, 225 ff., and Plate VI. Murray, however, thinks the vase shows kinship with the Apulian vases, and suggests the influence of later tragedy in southern Italy. In general cf. Roscher *Myth. Lexikon*, and *PWRE.*, s.v. "Alkmene."

If the absence of Teiresias in an active rôle from Plautus' play (but cf. 1128, 1145) requires us to imagine another expounder and prophet, obviously Zeus himself would satisfy all the demands of the situation. The birth, then, in such a tragedy was probably foretold in connection with an explanation of the dilemma.

Nor is it difficult to imagine a second type of tragedy in which the birth is announced as an accomplished fact, with an account of the strangling of the serpents; to that extent the birth becomes part of the dramatic action. The splendid effect of the action of the *Amphitruo* 1052, at which point Amphitruo is struck down by a thunderbolt and discovered by Bromia in the midst of her excited announcement of the birth and the strangling of the serpents, can hardly have come from any but a tragic source; and the whole of the last three acts constitutes a unit of uninterrupted action, as Leo sees, and essentially tragic without any emphasis upon the motives of the comedy of errors. This unity is anticipated in the prologue-speech of Juppiter at the opening of the third act when he appears "ne hanc incohatam transigam comoediam" (868). In such a tragedy the long night of generation might well have been among the presuppositions stated in the prologue, but it will be observed that the action would require a visit from Zeus immediately preceding Amphitruo's return in order to provide the dramatic complications; such a night might conceivably be not the long night of generation but a night, long or short, of dalliance. In other words I should exactly reverse Wilamowitz' criticism of Leo: I find it easy "to think out to the end" a plot in which the night of conception is part of the action; I find it difficult to imagine the beginning of a plot that issues in the birth, unless that plot includes in the early part of the action a visit from Zeus by night; and once that condition is satisfied, I feel that there is some difficulty in introducing a night that is differentiated from the long night of the myth. It may be noted that the difficulties in the way of a serious dignified presentation of a tragedy in which the conception is presupposed, the long night as a night of dalliance introduced, and the birth reported as an accomplished fact at the end are difficulties that a tragic poet might at least alleviate by brief reference to the conception in the prologue and by minimizing the element of *voluptas* in the action; the

impressiveness of *Amphitruo* 546-50 and of the action at 1052 is essentially tragic; one belongs to a plot involving the long night, the other to a plot of Heracles' birth; that they come from one and the same tragedy is, of course, not incontestable.

But whatever difficulties a tragic poet might have met in combining the long night with the plot of birth, no comic poet need have been troubled by the resulting complications. To any poet the possibilities arising from a combination of the long night with the birth must have made a strong appeal. The picturesque and the dramatic effects of the long night, the thunder-storm, the birth, and the strangling of the serpents, although one or two of them may be sufficient for any single drama, become tremendously effective when combined in one play; and at least in a comedy the complications which lead Leo to call the combination an "Unding" cannot be considered for a moment in comparison with the dramatic advantage offered by the combination, and illustrated even in Plautus by the conclusion of the first act and the action at 1052.

In brief I must deny that there is anything inevitable in Leo's ascribing to Plautus the merging of the long night with material that is alien to it. Any Greek poet—comic poet if you insist—would be more naturally tempted than Plautus (whose sensitiveness to dramatic effects is certainly not easily established) to make this combination. The myth supplies a long night of generation and a birth at a natural interval; but once the poet, tempted by dramatic possibilities, combines the two elements, an inevitable result follows: the normal limitation of dramatic action to twenty-four hours leaves the poet an option between (1) keeping the long night as a night of generation and making the birth a miraculous birth on the following day, and (2) changing the long night to a night of dalliance, and setting back the generation so that the birth may follow naturally on the morning after the long night. The second of these two alternatives was chosen by the poet of the Greek original of the *Amphitruo*.

II

Although the starting-point of Leo's theory is far from inevitable, he seems to have made out a strong case in his analysis of ii. 1, and ii. 2, in their relation to i. 3—at least if the reader of the play conceives

the scene-setting as Leo does. In his view these two scenes are essentially repetitions of each other: both take place before the house of Alcmena; in the first Amphitruo arrives with Sosia, scolding his slave, doubting the slave's story of Mercury's presence; at the end of the scene he enters the house to test the truth of Sosia's statements, accompanied by Sosia (Leo rejects 629-32 as a later addition); Alcmena appears and delivers her monody (633 ff.); in the following dialogue Amphitruo and Sosia are again present; they appear not to have heard the monody; Amphitruo makes no reference to the previous action; the scene seems to mark their first arrival at the house, duplicating ii. 1; the first scene continues the comedy of errors; the second has no organic connection with the comedy of errors.

Before offering a different explanation of the situation, I must express a mild dissent upon some details of Leo's contention. The monody of Alcmena in his view is unique: it is contrary to the usual practice that Amphitruo and Sosia should not hear this monody or refer to it in any way, or (as Leo neglects to say) that Alcmena should not at the end of her monody note the presence of the other two and, with or without a slight interval, accost them or be accosted by them. This failure to note their presence is the more noticeable defect; for otherwise the situation is not very different from *Bacch.* 385 ff. compared with 405 ff. or *Persa* 52 ff. compared with 81 ff.; and in *Bacch.* 169 ff. compared with 179 ff. Chrysalus delivers his monologue (to be sure, of a special type) and notes the presence of Ptoleclus (who, in my understanding of the action, left the stage at 169, and comes out of the house of Bacchis at 179) only at 182. I venture to suggest that the essential difference—the failure to note the arrival of Amphitruo and Sosia—is due to the fact that the passage is an emotional aria like that of Philolaches in the *Mostellaria*, and the prosaic announcement of the presence of Amphitruo and Sosia less appropriate; similarly Philolaches does not mention the presence of the two women till they have begun their conversation.

Again, Leo remarks (p. 256) that the monody of Alcmena cannot originally have stood before the dialogue that begins at 654; as he reconstructs the original (p. 257), after Juppiter's departure in 550 (Mercury left the stage at 543) Alcmena remained on the stage and expressed her grief at being so soon separated from her lover. In

this way Leo suggests the intimate relation between i. 3 and ii. 2, and the interruption occasioned by ii. 1. This intimate relation I do not question, but what becomes of the dramatic effect of Juppiter's dignified dismissal of the long night in 546-50 (marking the end of a *μέρος* in Leo's own scheme of *μέρη* in *Der Monolog*, p. 61) if, instead of marking the end of a *μέρος*, it feebly issues into a pathetic monody followed without interval by a dialogue scene? Are there not obvious dramatic advantages in ending a *μέρος* with the dismissal of the long night by Juppiter, and in accentuating this climax by resuming after it the action of the comedy of errors in ii. 1, deferring to ii. 2 the transition to tragic action? And who is more likely to be sensitive to these niceties of dramatic technique? Plautus or his Greek original?

But, apart from these reservations, I should have to accept Leo's argument if I conceived the action of these two scenes as he does; and I might even strengthen his case by pointing out the repetition of *sequere hac* in 660 and 674 after the *sequere hac* of 628; apparently the case is obvious: we have two versions of Amphitruo's first arrival at home, clumsily juxtaposed in the process of contamination.

Unhappily Leo has misconceived the entire situation: in his view ii. 1 takes place before or in close proximity to the house of Alcmena; but he can hardly have noted significant phrases in ii. 1 which clearly indicate that the action takes place at a considerable distance from Alcmena's house. If the action occurs before Amphitruo's home what possible sense can be extracted from his threat in 583 ff.: "at tē ego faciam hodie proinde ac meritis es, ut minus valeas et miser sis, *salvos domum si rediero: iam sequere sis?*" Obviously Amphitruo has not returned home and is not very near to it if he may say conditionally, "*salvos domum si rediero*"; there are some risks, imaginary but plausible, before he can reach home. And if Sosia is standing near the very house that he attempted to enter the night before, why in 603 does he say "prius multo ante aedis stabam quam illo adveneram"? Why not "*huc adveneram*"? In 613 why does Sosia say: "Sosiam servom tuom praeter me alterum, inquam, *adveniens* faciam ut offendas domi"? Why the conditional participle or temporal participle *adveniens* if he has already got within sight of the house? And has not 587 ("*nunc venis etiam ultro inrisum dominum*") the proper force only in case, after his misadventure at

the house of Alcmena, Sosia has returned to the harbor and at the harbor, or between the harbor and the house, is now addressing Amphitruo in this scene? Finally if they are already at home what possible point is there in the clear contrasts of 562 and 593: "scelestis-sume, audes mihi praedicare id, *domi* te esse nunc qui *hic* ades (562); quo id, malum, pacto potest . . . fieri, nunc uti tu <et> *hic* sis et *domi*" (593)? That they are near or at the harbor is clear from the verses 629-32, which Leo, in his misconception of the situation, has ejected from the text because they seem to suggest that Sosia is *sent back* to the ship; certainly they are difficult verses if the action occurs before the house of Alcmena; but if the speakers are at the ship already, the lines become absolutely pertinent, and Leo's "hier wird die Sachlage getrübt" (p. 255, n. i) turns out to be only a confession of his own unnecessary mystification.

In brief, the action is as follows: at 550 the long night is dismissed; the scene changes; we are at the harbor; Sosia has returned after his encounter with Mercury (cf. 460) and reported to Amphitruo; Amphitruo refuses to believe the story and abuses Sosia; Amphitruo is about to start for home, and orders Sosia to accompany him (551: "age i tu secundum," and Sosia's reply: "sequor, subsequor te"). But the two delay to indulge in abuse and attempted explanation until 628 when Amphitruo, making a new start, says: "sequere hac igitur me, nam mi istuc primum exquisito est opus." He must go home and look into the matter; but he wishes to take home the trophies, especially the *cistellula* (cf. 773) containing the *aurea patera* of the king, Pterela, whom he has conquered; so he says to Sosia (629): "sed vide ex navi eferantur quae imperavi omnia." Sosia, however, has not forgotten his orders, and while he is stating this fact (630-31) a train of slaves appears bearing the baggage (cf. "duc hos intro," 854); Amphitruo, Sosia, and the slaves leave the harbor as Amphitruo remarks: "utinam di faxint infecta dicta re eveniant tua" (632). The scene now changes; we are again before the house of Alcmena; she appears and delivers her monody; in the course of it, or toward the end, the party that left the harbor at 632 appears before the house; without noticing the presence of Alcmena, Amphitruo expresses the belief that he will be welcomed by his wife (654 ff.); they stop at some distance from the door; Amphitruo

urges Sosia on ("sequere hac," 660); Sosia sees Alcmena (664 ff.), who has already discovered them (660); but Amphitruo's eyes are turned in a different direction, and he does not discover her until she comes to meet him (675-76); and there is nothing in the consequent action that conflicts with the sketch that I have drawn; the *cistellula* and the slaves (854) have been accounted for in our description of ii.1. Nor need Leo any longer be surprised that ii. 2 contains no reference to the matter of ii. 1; the more important complications introduced in 683 by Alcmena's casual remark make the confusion in the Sosia-Mercury doublet of secondary interest as compared with the question, Who is Amphitruo's double?

I think any reader will see that this was the action intended by the poet; it solves at once all the difficulties that Leo has foisted upon the text. When Ussing¹ introduced the scene ii. 1 with the comment "nova scena non ante aedes Alcmenae agitur, sed prope naves," etc., he destroyed, without knowing it, Leo's theory of contamination. I am glad that I need not be held responsible for such a disposal of this ingenious if mistaken interpretation of one with whom every student of Plautus seldom disagrees, and then only with reluctance.

Leo will hardly expect a consideration of the details of his argument; he has admitted in his answer to Wilamowitz that it is not a matter of details but of "das Gefüge des Stückes." Nor, I hope, will anybody question my interpretation because this changing of scene is unique. Such change of scene is Aristophanic;² mythological travesty belongs to the Old Comedy and to the transition period from Old to New; this unique element is not to be questioned because of its isolation; it means simply that the *Amphitruo* is the most important document that we possess (with the *Persa*) for reconstructing the antecedents of the New Comedy of Hellenistic Athens.

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¹ Ussing marred his interpretation by rejecting vs. 629-31 on grounds that Langen (*Plautin. Studien*, 237) found to be invalid. Palmer says: "Amphitruo . . . is on his way from the harbor to his home."

² It is at present immaterial how the change of scene was managed; but it should be noted that if the interpretation above is convincing and the scenes appeared in the Greek original, the question whether there was a change of background in the supposed changes of scene in the Old Comedy can hardly be considered in future without including the pertinent material in the *Amphitruo*.

